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DISEASE INCREASE MAY LOWER DOVE POPULATION

Mourning doves in Alabama, Georgia, northwestern Florida, and neighboring States are being hard hit by a contagious disease called trichomoniasis, the Department of the Interior reports.

Wildlife experts of the Fish and Wildlife Service state that research data from Federal Aid units in State game agencies and other sources, reveal trends of this sickness to be upward, especially in southeastern States. It is believed that trichomoniasis was a definite contributing cause to the low hunting dove take last fall in this region.

Good evidence exists that the disease occurs throughout the United States, and may at times result in tremendous losses in dove population. It is caused by a parasite passed from bird to bird primarily through their habit of billing, and feeding young by regurgitation of "pigeon milk". Wide migrations of the species combined with gregarious ways tend to spread the disease.

Infected mourning doves develop a yellowish mass in the throat. This is sometimes accompanied by swellings of the neck. Ultimately, the diseased birds die of starvation or suffocation due to windpipe blockage. Previously, the ailment has been more common in domestic pigeons than in wild doves.

Dove project biologists in Federal Aid units of Aid units of Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia are studying the problem further to determine extent of current losses and percentage of carriers in the dove population. This requires examination of throat swabs under the microscope. Birds can be infected without being sick. Such doves are potential sources of infection to other birds.

At the Service's Patuxent Research Refuge in Maryland, research is now being conducted to find the percentage of carriers in local doves and pigeons. Studies there will show how a given set of doves reacts to the same parasite. Suitable measures may then be found to control infection in our wild dove populations.

Many who have worked with trichomoniasis have conjectured as to the possibility of its presence in the vast hordes of passenger pigeons now extinct. If so, it would not have been the hunter's gun alone which hastened the end of this attractive bird. Some of the blame would have to fall on the disease with the big name.

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